

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, CS

SUBJECT: ALLEGED VESCO SHIPMENT OF ARMS

REFS: SAN JOSE 3570, SAN JOSE 3245

1. TEXT OF SEPT. 17 REUTERS DISPATCH

FOLLOWS:

BEGIN QUOTE:

AN ASSOCIATE OF FUGITIVE FINANCIER ROBERT VESCO REFUSED TO TESTIFY TODAY BEFORE SENATE INVESTIGATORS INTO CHARGES THAT HE SMUGGLED SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS TO THE MILLIONAIRE IN COSTA RICA.

THOMAS P RICHARDSON, A LOS ANGELES STOCKBROKER, WOULD NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS BY THE SENATE INVESTIGATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE ON GROUNDS THAT HIS TESTIMONY MIGHT INCRIMINATE HIM. THE PANEL, HEADED BY SENATOR HENRY JACKSON (DEM.- WASHINGTON), HEARD OTHER TESTIMONY THAT MR. RICHARDSON BOUGHT 14 SEMI-AUTOMATIC RIFLES AND RIOT GUNS AND FLEW THEM TO COSTA RICA ON HIS PRIVATE JET APRIL 19.

SENATOR JACKSON SAID A FEDERAL GRAND JURY IN LOS

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ANGELES IS INVESTIGATING WHETHER GUN-SMUGGLING LAWS WERE

VIOLATED.

THREE VAN NUYS, CALIF., AIRPORT WORKERS TOLD THE SUB-COMMITTEE THEY SAW GUNS LOADED ON THE 750,000 DOLLAR PLANE, AND THE PLANES TWO PILOTS SAID THE GUNS WERE UN-LOADED IN SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA, TO EMPLOYEES OF MR. VESCO.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE WEAPONS WAS NOT MADE CLEAR DURING THE HEARING, BUT SENATOR JACKSON SAID THE MILITARY-TYPE WEAPONS WENT TO A COUNTRY THAT HAS NO ARMED FORCES. A COMMITTEE INVESTIGATOR SAID ONE GUN, A .22-CALIBER RIFLE THAT COULD BE FOLDED INTO A PACKAGE, WAS SIMILAR TO WEAPONS SEEN IN JAMES BOND MOVIES.

TWO SUBCOMMITTEE INVESTIGATORS FOUND THE RICHARDSON PLANE IN SAN ANTONIO LAST MONTH AND IT WAS SEIZED BY U.S. CUSTOMS OFFICIALS.

MR. RICHARDSON, WHO SEEMED NERVOUS, PLEADED THE FIFTH AMENDMENT NINE TIMES AND HIS LAWYERS INVOKED THE U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE ONCE.

THE THREE AIRPORT WORKERS SAID THEY SAW BOXES OF GUNS IN THE SMALL HOURS OF APRIL 19. AT OTHER TIMES, ONE SAID, WINE, CHEESES, SALAMI, AND CHAMPAGNE WERE PUT ON THE PLANE

ONE PILOT, DAVID MILLER, SAID HE FLEW ABOUT 400 FLIGHTS FOR MR. RICHARDSON OR MR. VESCO THIS YEAR. HE DESCRIBED SOME TRIPS AS CLOAK-AND-DAGGER OPERATIONS IN WHICH FLIGHT PLANS WERE CHANGED AND MYSTERIOUS PEOPLE WERE TAKEN ABOARD.

BOTH MR. MILLER AND ANOTHER PILOT, WOLFGANG CZAIA, TESTIFIED THAT THEY HAD FLOWN THE APRIL 19 FLIGHT FROM VAN NUYS TO NASSAU WHERE MORE CARGO WAS LOADED, AND THEN ON TO COSTA RICA WHERE IT WAS DISCHARGED.

ANOTHER WITNESS, MISS LUZETTE BIDAŁ OF LOS ANGELES, ALSO REFUSED TO TESTIFY. A SUBCOMMITTEE STAFF MEMBER SAID

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SHE HAD BEEN FLOWN FROM CALIFORNIA TO ATLANTIC CITY, N.J., ON MR. RICHARDSONS PLANE, BUT HE WOULD NOT GIVE FURTHER DETAILS.

THE STAFF INVESTIGATORS ALSO REFUSED TO EXPLAIN ONE OF SENATOR JACKSONS QUESTIONS TO MR. RICHARDSON CONCERNING AN ALLEGED SHIPMENT OF MACHINE GUNS FROM FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA.

PILOT MILLER SAID MANY SHIPMENTS TO MR. VESCO WERE
ITEMS HE COULD NOT GET IN COSTA RICA, SUCH AS SURFBOARDS
AND TELEVISION SETS.
END QUOTE.

2. DEPT. WILL FOLLOW WITH RESPONSE TO REFTELS.
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